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SUBJECT: BRINGING ESTONIAN AND U.S. TIP NGOS TOGETHER

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. In January 2006 the GOE passed its National Action Plan (NAP) to combat trafficking in persons (TIP). However, prior to and since the NAP's passing, many NGOs have criticized the plan for its lack of consultation with civil society. On July 19 post organized a roundtable discussion with Estonian NGOs to discuss shared challenges and concerns. Immediately following the roundtable, post also arranged a digital video conference (DVC) between Estonian NGOs and U.S. based TIP NGOs to share experiences on best practices. Estonian participants told us these two events gave them new ideas on how to work more effectively with key GOE ministries and law enforcement agencies. End summary.

Getting everyone around the "Roundtable"

¶2. (SBU) In January 2006 the GOE passed its National Action Plan (NAP) to combat trafficking in persons (TIP). One of the key elements in the NAO was for greater GOE consultation and cooperation with Estonian NGOs. However, prior to and since the NAP's passing, many NGOs have criticized the GOE's efforts, and have called for greater transparency, consultation, and input in development of TIP policy. On July 19, we organized a roundtable which brought together the leading Estonian TIP NGOs to assess the strengths and weaknesses in the GOE's efforts to combat TIP.

¶3. (U) The discussion centered on the lack of formal and regular channels of communication between GOE and civil society. A recent case mentioned by the NGOs highlights this lack of cooperation and information. In July an Estonian minor (a sixteen year old girl) was approached in Tallinn to be an au pair in Turkey. When she contacted the Estonian Embassy in Ankara, they were unable to refer her to the NGOs that specialize in providing background check information for those interested in working abroad. It was only by the minor's initiative that she was able to find the relevant NGO and be informed of the dubious nature of the job offer. As most young people cannot be counted on to check out job offers this thoroughly, the NGOs were concerned by how many trafficking cases could be prevented by a better referral system.

A little help from new American friends

¶4. (U) Immediately after the roundtable, a DVC was conducted to bring together the Estonians NGOs at the roundtable and two US based anti-TIP NGOs ("SOS Boat People" and "Polaris Project"). The DVC focused primarily on an exchange of information and best

practices in three areas: fostering a positive relationship with the government; approaching non-governmental agencies (i.e., foundations) for assistance/funding; and victim assistance. Because the tradition of non-governmental organizations is a relatively new notion for Estonia, the Estonian NGOs were eager to find out how their American counterparts ensure successful operation in combating TIP and securing regular funding. The most serious obstacle Estonian NGOs face is insufficient funding. Estonian NGOs are still heavily dependent upon sporadic funding from the GOE and hesitant to seek alternative funding from the private sector (i.e., corporations, foundations, etc.). The participating Estonians studiously peppered their U.S. counterparts on this topic and found their methods (from fund-raising to cost cutting) extremely topical and helpful.

¶ 15. (SBU) Due to Estonia's small population, NGOs are still communicating with the GOE and law enforcement agencies based on personal connections rather than any institutionalized mechanism. As a result, when key GOE officials change positions or NGO advocates leave their organizations, critical lines of communications are often lost and need to be recreated. The American NGOs encouraged their Estonian counterparts to explore the possibility of concluding a written memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the GOE and to work out a formal victim referral mechanism with the GOE. Not only would this greatly enhance NGO-government cooperation, but also assist in TIP-prevention and victim assistance. Polaris described an inter-agency task force in the Washington, D.C. area which is made up of various governmental representatives, law enforcement, and NGOs. According to Polaris, the task force has been successful in coordinating local DC government efforts as well as institutionalizing the communication and coordination between government agencies and NGOs.

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¶ 16. (U) The U.S. NGOs also shared a number of concrete practical tips for improving victim's assistance. For example, Polaris Project explained that while they lack the funds to maintain a 24 hour hotline, they use volunteers to act as "duty officers" and have the hotline redirected to their cell phones on a rotating basis.

¶ 17. (SBU) Comment. As the Estonian NGO community is still relatively new, there is a tendency for NGOs to merely criticize the GOE without offering realistic alternatives or areas of cooperation. During the roundtable and DVC, the NGOs began to explore areas of common ground with the GOE and consider tangible and feasible cooperation efforts. The Estonian NGOs made great use of their opportunity receive tips from the U.S. NGOs. One of the Estonian NGOs, "Living for Tomorrow", has already followed up with their U.S. counterparts to get contact information of additional U.S. NGOs working on TIP. End Comment.

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